

## **Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo**

### **September 25, 2009**

**From the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
(RIDE):**

- [Commissioner's Welcome](#) to the Field Memo
- Information: [Technology](#) Capacity Survey
- [School prayer](#) compliance – **response required**
- [H1N1](#) updates: posted on Health Department Web site
- RIDE to complete [I-Plan](#) training in January

**Other:**

- [Prudential](#) Spirit of Community Awards deadline
- [C-span](#) Student Documentary Contest
- Free Field Trips to [Plimoth Plantation](#)

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**From RIDE:**

### **Welcome to the Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**

*Audience: All*

Welcome to the Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo, which we will send every Friday to all superintendents and which we will post on the Commissioner's page on the RIDE Web site, [www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov). I have created this page to improve communications between RIDE and the field.

I know that you receive a great deal of information from RIDE. This information has come to you from many sources at RIDE, through many formats, and at varying times. I have heard from you that it has been difficult to keep track of these communications and to distinguish between messages that require your immediate attention and messages that are informational only. With this Weekly Field Memo, I hope to coordinate all RIDE communications to the field so that we can work together more effectively to advance learning for all students.

I encourage you to share these memos with members of your staff, as needed. RIDE staff members will also forward these memos to others, such as principals or business managers, when an item on the weekly memo needs their attention.

This Weekly Field Memo is a work in progress, and I'm open to any suggestions that will make this memo more useful and helpful to you. If you have any feedback or comments that can help us to improve the Weekly Field Memo, please let me know, at [deborah.gist@ride.ri.gov](mailto:deborah.gist@ride.ri.gov)

### **Executive Summary of Rhode Island Technology Capacity Survey Is Posted Online**

*Audience: Superintendents, Business Managers, Technology Directors*

Below you will find a link to the Executive Summary of the Rhode Island Technology Capacity Survey, which RIDE gave to all districts

in the spring of 2009 to assess student access to technology, to determine systems and supports already in place, and to ascertain professional-development opportunities at the district and school level. The information collected in the survey reflects local and state conversations about technology infrastructure and integration in PK-12 classrooms.

It is evident that Rhode Island is fortunate to have such dedicated technology directors and teacher leaders who are working tirelessly to improve the use of technology in our schools. Although there are many examples of successful technology integration in our state, the survey revealed that these are not consistent. Student access to computers varies greatly among school levels and districts. The data indicate that districts have limited capacity to support and sustain the necessary infrastructure and data-collection requirements at the local, state, and federal level. Appropriate professional development is necessary to allow for data-driven decision-making and the effective integration of technology into all classrooms. There are numerous opportunities for us to realize efficiencies. We will use the survey results to inform investment decisions regarding using Race to the Top and other ARRA funds to help educators make appropriate, data-driven decisions.

Thank you to all districts for participating in the Rhode Island Technology Capacity Survey. The information gathered is integral to our ability to use data effectively to inform state and local policymaking and program decisions within districts and schools. Here are links to the Executive Summary and survey data:

2009 ***Executive Summary:***

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/instruction/intech/techsurvey.aspx>

**2009 Detailed Report:**

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/instruction/intech/PDF/Detailed\\_Report-2009\\_Final.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/instruction/intech/PDF/Detailed_Report-2009_Final.pdf)

**2009 District Level Survey Data:**

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/techsurvey/district.aspx>

**2009 School Level Survey Data:**

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/applications/techsurvey/school.aspx>

**School Prayer Certification Requirements**

*Audience: Superintendents – Response Required*

I have received from the U.S. Department of Education this e-mail regarding school prayer:

This letter serves as a reminder of the upcoming deadlines for certifications relating to constitutionally protected prayer that are required as a condition of receiving funds under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As you know, the U.S. Department of Education's (Department) Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools (Guidance) summarizes the current state of the law concerning constitutionally protected prayer in the public schools and explains the responsibilities of state educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) under the ESEA in this area. In particular, as a condition of receiving funds under the ESEA, Section 9524(b) requires the following:

\* By October 1 of each year, in order to receive funds under the ESEA, an LEA must certify in writing to its SEA that no policy of the LEA prevents, or otherwise denies participation in, constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in the Guidance. An LEA must provide this certification to the SEA.

• By November 1 of each year, the SEA must send to the Department a list of those LEAs that have not filed the required certification or against which complaints have been made to the SEA that the LEA is not in compliance with this Guidance. The SEA's submission should describe what investigation or enforcement action the SEA has initiated with respect to each listed LEA and the status of the investigation or action. In the event that all LEAs are in compliance and no complaints have been

made against any LEAs, the SEA should notify the Department to that effect by November 1.

LEAs must be clear in their written certification that no policy of the LEA prevents, or otherwise denies, participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as detailed in the Guidance. The Guidance was published in the Federal Register on February 28, 2003, and is available at [http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer\\_guidance.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html).

Using the certification form that I have attached to this e-mail, please respond with your written assurance that your district is in compliance with school-prayer laws and regulations. Thanks for your attention to this matter.

### **H1N1 Partner Briefings**

*Audience: Superintendents*

The H1N1 Partner and Provider briefings are available weekly at <http://www.health.ri.gov/news/flu/>, and RIDE will no longer forward these updates to you via e-mail. I encourage you to visit the Department of Health Web site regularly, as H1N1 guidance is regularly updated as new information becomes available.

I will continue to update you, however, with all information regarding any H1N1 issue that is directly related to schools. RIDE staff will remain in close contact with school nurses regarding all H1N1 issues.

### **RIDE to Conclude I-Plan Training Sessions**

The Office of Educator Quality and Certification has nearly completed the I-Plan training cycle that has been underway since 2004. RIDE will continue to conduct training sessions through January 2010. We are confident that the availability and training we have provided to individual educators and district representatives over the past five years is sufficient to meet the

needs of our educator workforce. Educators who need additional I-Plan training support should contact their district I-Plan trainers. RIDE will conduct no additional training sessions. Thank you for helping us to fully implement the I-Plan certification process!

**Other:**

**15<sup>th</sup> Annual Prudential Spirit of Community Awards Seeks to Honor Top Youth Volunteers**

*Audience: Superintendents, Principals, School Counselors*

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program is the nation's largest youth-recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service. The program was created in 1995 by Prudential in partnership with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) to honor middle level and high school students for outstanding service to others at the local, state, and national level.

The program's goals are to applaud young people who already are making a positive difference in their towns and neighborhoods and to inspire others to think about how they might contribute to their communities. Over the past 14 years, more than 260,000 young Americans have participated in the program, and nearly 90,000 of them have been officially recognized for their volunteer work.

Applications for the 2010 Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program will be accepted up to November 2nd, 2009. To apply online, [click here](#). To request a paper application, call 1-877-525-8491 toll-free.

## **C-SPAN ANNOUNCES CALL FOR ENTRIES FOR 2010 STUDENTCAM DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION**

*Audience: Superintendents, Principals, Media-technology specialists, Social Studies teachers*

C-SPAN wants to know what national issues are on the minds of students, and announced today its call for entries in the **2010 StudentCam video documentary competition**.

[http://download.rbn.com/cspan/cspan/download/classroom/StudentCam2010\\_promo\\_2.zip](http://download.rbn.com/cspan/cspan/download/classroom/StudentCam2010_promo_2.zip)

The national competition, sponsored by America's cable television industry through C-SPAN and now in its sixth year, invites all middle school students (grades 6-8) and high school students (grades 9-12) to produce a five to eight minute video documentary using C-SPAN programming.

Students for this year's competition will have the opportunity to produce a documentary on either of the following topics:

A) One of the country's greatest strengths;

-OR-

B) A challenge the country is facing.

A total of **\$50,000** will be awarded in cash prizes, which includes 75 student awards and 11 teacher awards. The Grand Prize winner with the best overall entry will be awarded \$5,000, with multiple cash prize awards of \$250, \$500, \$750, \$1,500, and \$3,000 to students in both middle and high school categories.

**Free Field Trips to Plimoth Plantation Available**

*Audience: Principals, teachers*

The Felicia Fund of Rhode Island has announced a \$5,000 grant awarded in support of Plimoth Plantation's *Foundations For Kids* program, providing financial support for schools to visit Plimoth Plantation and *Mayflower II*. The Felicia Fund grant specifically awards funding to students of Rhode Island schools in Providence and Bristol counties, allowing them to participate in field trips to Plimoth Plantation, and/or to receive Colonial and Native classroom visits by specially trained museum educators.

The \$5,000 grant received from the Felicia Fund will assist public schools in much of Rhode Island, many of which have limited enhancement budgets and otherwise may not be able to bring their students to Plimoth Plantation, or to bring museum educators into their classrooms. Interested teachers and administrators at these schools will work in collaboration with Plimoth Plantation to determine whether participation in a field trip, a classroom visit, or both options, will be best for their students. Program participants receive preparatory materials developed by Plimoth Plantation's Education Department that will fit appropriately into the state of Rhode Island's mandated standards-based education frameworks.

The resources available will be distributed to eligible Providence and Bristol County schools on a first reserve- first served basis. Funding is limited, so those interested in applying to take part in the *Foundations For Kids* program should please contact: Kate Curran at (508) 746-1622, extension 8359, or [programservices@plimoth.org](mailto:programservices@plimoth.org) for more information.



